

**STUDY GUIDE 17**  
**Revelation 3:1-13**

*Study warm-up:* What attribute of Jesus Christ has been especially meaningful to you of late?

*OBSERVATION – Lord, help me to discover it!*

*INTERPRETATION – Lord, help me to understand it.*

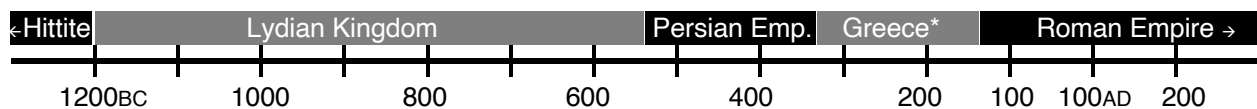
Our study this week focuses on the messages to the churches at Sardis and Philadelphia.



Figure 17-1

**Regional Powers**

The following timeline provides a representation of the region's empires. Our investigation into Sardis and Philadelphia will touch historical points across centuries.



\* After 40 years of Greek rule, the area rebelled against Greece and became mostly autonomous (Kingdom of Pergamon) for about 150 years; Greece considered it a Greek city-state.

Figure 17-2

## Sardis

From 1200 - 546 BC, the Lydian Kingdom held most of the territory that is western Turkey today. Lydia's capital, Sardis, was located on one of the several plateaus branching off of a mountain range that runs west to east. Sardis was built on a plateau on the northern side of the mountain range near the highest peak, Mount Tmolus, (7,076 feet.) The plateau has almost vertical sides, rising up from the plains by 1,500 feet and a single, winding road for access which made the city nearly impregnable by invaders.

As the city grew in population and wealth, it expanded into the valley below on the western and northern sides of the plateau. The fortified citadel remained in the upper city, with watchtowers to safeguard the area. The population was complacent, feeling secure in their wealth and safety.

The rock sides of the plateau were smooth, but the rock itself was soft and crumbly – almost like hardened mud. Weather and time caused small cracks in the plateau sides to grow wide. In 547 BC, Cyrus the Great of Persia lay siege to Sardis. Unable to reach the citadel, Cyrus offered a reward to any of his men who could discover a way up to the top of the plateau. One of Cyrus' soldiers, Hyeroeades, observed a Sardian soldier drop his helmet off the edge of the wall at the top of the plateau and then climb down to retrieve it. Hyeroeades realized the plateau precipice was scalable. Later that night he led a team of soldiers up a wide crack in the rock face. The Sardians were not even guarding this area and the Persians easily entered the citadel and Sardis fell.

Centuries later, history repeated – a soldier in Alexander the Great's army replicated Hyeroeades' feat and Sardis came under Greek rule.

By the time Sardis was part of the Roman empire, it was well known for wool trading and dyeing wool. There was a bustling textile and clothing trade in Sardis.



**Upper City Ruins,  
Mount Tmolus in the Background**

Photo: Tim and Jan Cowles

*Figure 17-3*



**Bath-Gymnasium**  
(late 2<sup>nd</sup>, early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD)

Photo: Tim and Jan Cowles

*Figure 17-4*

Read Revelation 3:1-6.

1. At the end of this Study Guide there is a place to summarize the message to the church in Sardis. Record the following on those pages. (Note that some messages may not have every element.)
  - a. The description of Jesus
  - b. The church's commendation
  - c. The church's admonishment
  - d. Instructions/warnings to the church
  - e. Consequences if the instructions are not followed
  - f. Promises to the overcomer
  
2. What do you learn about the Spirit in Isaiah 11:1, 2 that may help you understand the phrase, "He who has the seven spirits of God," in Revelation 3:1?

The number seven is used in the Bible to represent completion and perfection. Here is a meager sampling of the sevens in Scripture:

- ❖ Creation was finished in six days and on the seventh day, God rested.
- ❖ Joshua was instructed to march around Jericho once a day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day. Seven priests were to carry trumpets and the trumpets were to be sounded on the seventh day. (Joshua 6:1-4)
- ❖ In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes seven *I am the* statements. (*I AM* is also God's name which He revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14.) (John 6:35, 8:12, 10:9, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, and 15:5)
- ❖ In Revelation there are hundreds of instances of seven; here are just a few:
  - There are letters to seven churches, Jesus walks among seven lampstands and has seven stars in His right hand. (Revelation 1:4, 12, 16)
  - The scroll held by God on the throne has seven seals. (Revelation 5:1)
  - The Lamb before the throne has seven horns and seven eyes, which are **the seven spirits of God** sent out into all the earth. (Revelation 5:6)
  - Seven angels have seven trumpets. (Revelation 8:2)
  - Seven peals of thunder reveal a message from a small scroll that John is instructed to keep secret. (Revelation 10:1-4)
  - Seven angels are given seven bowls of God's wrath to pour. (Revelation 15:7)
  - The book contains seven blessings. (Revelation 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, and 22:14)

3. How is Sardis' history reflected in Jesus' words in verses 3:1-2, "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God."? (Think about Sardis' reputation and how it may have influenced the church's self-perception.)
  
4. How is the warning in Revelation 3:3 especially relevant to a believer in Sardis?
  
5. Read Revelation 3:4, 5 one more time.
  - a. What does the clothing represent? (The cross references that follow may help.)
  
  - b. Zechariah 3:1-5 (One of the visions Zechariah had related to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple after the Babylonian exile.)
  
  - c. Isaiah 61:10

6. What is significant about having one's name written in the book of life? (Revelation 20:11-15, regarding judgment before the great white throne, and Revelation 21:22-27 about the new Jerusalem will help.)

### **Philadelphia**

When Alexander the Great died, Asia Minor came under Alexander's general Seleucus I Nicator's control. After 40 years, Philetaerus, who had served under the Seleucid governor Lysimachus, rebelled and the region operated mostly autonomously for 150 years as the Kingdom of Pergamon. Attalus II was king at the time of the founding of Philadelphia. Attalus II Philadelphos (*Philadelphos* being Greek for *one who loves his* brother) had succeeded his brother Eumenes II and it is thought that Attalus II named Philadelphia in honor of his deceased brother whom he dearly loved.

Philadelphia was established (as a doorway, in essence) with the intent of spreading Greek culture eastward and the effort was successful.

The soil around Philadelphia was favorable for growing grapes and Philadelphia became well known for its wines.

Western Turkey is close to several active tectonic plates. An earthquake in 17 AD destroyed Philadelphia, and other cities. Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar provided Philadelphia funding to rebuild. In gratitude, its name was changed to Neocaesarea. A few decades later Emperor Vespasian (who was part of the Flavian dynasty) sought to change Philadelphia's name to Flavia to shore up the city's loyalty to his rule. Neither name change stuck and the city remained Philadelphia until the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century AD under the Byzantine Empire, then its name was changed to Alaşehir, the name the city bears today.

There are no visible ruins of Philadelphia today. The oldest ruins in Alaşehir are from the Byzantine period, 330 -1453 AD.

Read Revelation 3:7-13.

7. At the end of this Study Guide there is a place to summarize the message to the church in Philadelphia. Record the following on those pages. (Note that some messages may not have every element.)
- The description of Jesus
  - The church's commendation



10. Reflect on Revelation 3:9. What is Jesus saying here? (A similar group of people are mentioned in the letter to the church in Smyrna in Revelation 2:9.)
11. In Revelation 2:10, the words *kept from* could also be translated as *kept through*. Look closely at what the church at Philadelphia will be kept *from* (or *through*). Which translation seems more applicable? Explain. (Another hint is contained in the phrase, *to test those who dwell on the earth*. *Those who dwell on the earth* are mentioned at least 12 times in Revelation 13, where they are contrasted with those whose names are in the book of life of the Lamb. *Those who dwell on the earth* are unbelievers – the lost who worship the Antichrist.)
12. What does Jesus mean in His instruction and caution in Revelation 2:11?
13. Put yourself in the sandals of the church body in Philadelphia. From what you have discovered about natural and political disruptions they faced, how are the promises to the overcomer a tremendous encouragement?

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*APPLICATION – Lord, help me to live it!*

14. The church in Sardis was spiritually dead. They seem to have been demonstrating the same inattentive and negligent behavior that had allowed the city to be captured multiple times. What is your personal takeaway (application) from the message to Sardis?

15. Look once more at the message to the church in Philadelphia, thinking about the power that Jesus has and the *little power* the church had. What do you find especially encouraging about Jesus' message to this body of believers? Is there similar encouragement for a situation you are facing?



## REFERENCES

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Missler, C. *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary*. Koininia House, 2005,

Ramsay, W. M. *The Letters to the Seven Churches in Asia*. First Rate Publishers, 2023.

 Cole Women's Bible Study Writing Team, 2024

## Additional Scripture for Study Guide 17

### ☐ **Isaiah 11:1, 2**

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,  
And a Branch from his roots will bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup>The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him,  
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The spirit of counsel and strength,  
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

### ☐ **Joshua 6:1-4**

Now Jericho was tightly shut because of the sons of Israel; no one went out and no one came in. <sup>2</sup>But the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have handed Jericho over to you, with its king *and* the valiant warriors. <sup>3</sup>And you shall march around the city, all the men of war circling the city once. You shall do so for six days. <sup>4</sup>Also seven priests shall carry seven trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark; then on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets.

### ☐ **Exodus 3:14**

<sup>14</sup>God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

### ☐ **John 6:35**

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; the one who comes to Me will not be hungry, and the one who believes in Me will never be thirsty.

**John 8:12**

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; the one who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

**John 10:9**

I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

**John 10:11**

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

**John 11:25**

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies,

**John 14:6**

Jesus \*said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.

**John 15:5**

I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

**Revelation 1:4**

<sup>4</sup> John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,

**Revelation 1:12**

<sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;

**Revelation 1:16**

<sup>16</sup> In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

**Revelation 5:1**

I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.

**☐ Revelation 5:6**

<sup>6</sup> And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.

**☐ Revelation 8:2**

<sup>2</sup> And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.

**☐ Revelation 10:1-4**

I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; <sup>2</sup> and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; <sup>3</sup> and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices. <sup>4</sup> When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them."

**☐ Revelation 15:7**

<sup>7</sup> Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.

**☐ Revelation 1:3**

<sup>3</sup> Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

**☐ Revelation 14:13**

<sup>13</sup> And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."

**☐ Revelation 16:15**

<sup>15</sup> ("Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.")

**☐ Revelation 19:9**

<sup>9</sup> Then he \*said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he \*said to me, "These are true words of God."

**☐ Revelation 20:6**

<sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

**☐ Revelation 22:7**

<sup>7</sup> "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."

**☐ Revelation 22:14**

<sup>14</sup> Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.

**☐ Zechariah 3:1-5**

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. <sup>2</sup> The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" <sup>3</sup> Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. <sup>4</sup> He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Again he said to him, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes." <sup>5</sup> Then I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the LORD was standing by.

**☐ Isaiah 61:10**

<sup>10</sup> I will rejoice greatly in the LORD,  
My soul will exult in my God;  
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,  
He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness,  
As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

**☐ Revelation 20:11-15**

<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place

was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. <sup>14</sup> Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

□ **Revelation 21:22-27**

<sup>22</sup> I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. <sup>25</sup> In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; <sup>26</sup> and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; <sup>27</sup> and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

□ **Luke 1:30-33**

<sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; <sup>33</sup> and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

□ **Isaiah 22:20-23**

<sup>20</sup> "Then it will come about in that day,  
That I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah,  
<sup>21</sup> And I will clothe him with your tunic  
And tie your sash securely about him.  
I will entrust him with your authority,  
And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem  
and to the house of Judah.  
<sup>22</sup> "Then I will set the key of the house of David on his  
shoulder,  
When he opens no one will shut,  
When he shuts no one will open.

<sup>23</sup> "I will drive him *like* a peg in a firm place,  
And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house.

□ **Revelation 2:9**

<sup>9</sup> "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich),  
and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not,  
but are a synagogue of Satan.

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## **Sardis**

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*pithy description*

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*name meaning (if available)*

*Jesus' description (a)*

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*Church's Commendation (b)*

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*Church's Admonishment (c)*

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*Instructions/Warnings (d)*

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*Consequences (e)*

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*Promise to Overcomers (f)*

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*Personal Application*

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***The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***

## ***Philadelphia***

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*pithy description*

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*name meaning (if available)*

*Jesus' description (a)*

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*Church's Commendation (b)*

---

*Church's Admonishment (c)*

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